A BLUEPRINT FOR ESTABLISHING A CAREER READINESS CERTIFICATE

This blueprint outlines key activities to be considered when establishing a Career Readiness Certificate. The items listed are only suggestions, and the sequence of activities may vary by state.

I. Secure Support for the Career Readiness Certificate Concept*

The Career Readiness Certificate (CRC) must be employer-identified and supported. Therefore, the first step in creating a CRC is to secure business and industry support for a statewide, cross-industry, cross-occupation portable skills credential. Strategies for securing support from business and industry include:

- Seek endorsement from business and industry associations through presentations to association boards and/or committees, i.e. business associations, labor organizations, and industry associations.
- Facilitate employer focus groups to identify core employability skills needs of business and industry and demonstrate how CRC will meet identified skills needs.
- Conduct pilots throughout state to demonstrate the usefulness of the CRC and to directly involve employers in the development process (see item III. below).

Securing support also involves identifying a CRC "champion." The champion may be the Governor, the legislature, the State Workforce Investment Board (WIB), a State education board, a major employer or a combination thereof. The champion must be able to clearly articulate why the CRC is value-added in meeting employers' skills needs, and must be considered an "opinion leader" within the state. The champion should be the spokesperson for the CRC and lead the CRC project.

One strategy to secure widespread support is to involve the State WIB in the development and design of the CRC. As the oversight board for all local WIBs and one-stop career centers, the State WIB can help to ensure that the CRC is available and supported statewide, i.e. the State WIB may require Local WIBs to make the CRC accessible through each one-stop career center as part of the WIB certification process.

II. Develop Career Readiness Certificate System

Development of the CRC must be a partnership among business and industry, education and government. Establishing a state CRC Taskforce allows all partners to participate in the development and design of the CRC system. Activities associated with designing the CRC system:

- Finalize the design of the CRC (skills assessments and levels), and issuing entity (e.g., Governor, State WIB, Community College Board).
- Design "paper" CRC (e.g., state seal, signatures, text, colors).
- Design the process by which individuals can obtain a CRC (e.g., may be obtained at a one-stop career center, community college and/or partner program sites).
- Design CRC dissemination process to be used at statewide participating CRC sites (e.g., roles and responsibilities, measures, region/state interfaces).
- Develop a cost/site estimate and customer pricing, i.e. will the cost for the CRC cover assessments only or will it include overhead costs to administer and produce the CRC.
- Design and develop a CRC database, based on user needs, that contains WorkKeys and CRC information (e.g., WorkKeys assessment scores for individuals, CRC issuance information). Determine data collection method.
- Design and develop a CRC website (may be stand alone website or part of an existing website) to disseminate information to potential CRC certificate holders and other interested persons or organizations.
- Develop infrastructure and implementation budget. Budget items to be considered:
  - Database development (installation and training)
  - Website development (installation and training)
  - Travel associated with development and implementation activities
  - Marketing materials
  - CRC training for participating CRC sites
  - CRC printing
- Determine funding mechanism(s) for CRC. Possible funding sources:
  - "Seed" money from state, i.e. WIA state set-aside
  - State and federal workforce training and career education programs, i.e. Perkins, TANF, Adult Education, Rehabilitation Services
  - Business and industry associations
  - Employer investments

One strategy for ensuring the integrity of the CRC and its dissemination process is to partner with the community college system (or its equivalent depending on the state) to use its existing WorkKeys processes and ACT Service Centers. If the community college system does not have a strong WorkKeys infrastructure in place, then the State Taskforce may want to identify the most appropriate entity/organization to develop a strong WorkKeys infrastructure to support the CRC rather than creating a stand alone CRC process.

III. Pilot the Career Readiness Certificate

Piloting the CRC allows partners and stakeholders to see the results of the CRC before implementing statewide. CRC pilots will demonstrate that the CRC signals to employers that an individual possesses the basic core employability skills and is job ready. In addition, successful pilots will provide the CRC Taskforce information to improve CRC

processes and procedures, and an "industry-to-industry" endorsement for marketing the CRC. Suggested pilot process:

- Gain commitment from five 'Community College / Workforce Investment Board' regions to serve as pilot sites for the CRC.
- Develop CRC project briefing materials for the pilot regions and conduct briefings.
- Develop CRC system training materials for the pilot regions and conduct training on the web-based certification system.
- Gather information for database.
- Build the infrastructure to support each site.

IV. Create Career Readiness Certificate Communication Strategy

Marketing the CRC needs to include both top-down and bottom-up communication and education strategies. The CRC needs to be presented as meeting the core employability skills needs of business and industry, as identified by employers. It is essential to include WorkKeys seminars as part of the marketing and outreach efforts. Other suggested elements for marketing the CRC:

- Select CRC "ambassadors" for marketing and outreach at each pilot site and statewide.
- Develop a marketing/communication strategy that includes the use of success stories to spread the word, i.e. public service announcements using top industry leaders.
- Develop a marketing/communication plan that includes identification of target audiences and events, determination of appropriate communication media, creation of supporting materials and an ambassadors' schedule.
- If needed, select an advertising agency to assist with marketing

V. Roll-Out and Market the Career Readiness Certificate

Rolling-out the CRC should involve a series of events to make employers and jobseekers aware of the CRC, its benefits and how it may be obtained and used. The roll-out process should be designed by the State CRC Taskforce to ensure broad participation, representation and support at all roll-out activities. All roll-out activities should include employers who participated in the CRC pilots and who are familiar with WorkKeys. Roll-out awareness activities may include:

- Press conference by the Governor or other CRC "champion"
- Kick-Off event at single or multiple CRC locations throughout state to award CRC's given through the pilots
- Governor "Career Readiness Day" proclamation

*NOTE: It is important to note that there are several myths regarding the CRC and WorkKeys, which must be dispelled throughout the CRC development and implementation process. Common myths include:

Myth	Fact
The CRC is expensive to develop and implement.	The cost is minimal considering the potential ROI. Costs can be covered by various federal employment and training programs, the jobseeker and/or the employer. Start-up costs will vary by state depending on the infrastructure currently in place to support integrated service delivery and the use of WorkKeys. Minimum estimated cost associated with development and implementation is $20,000.
A bureaucracy, i.e. a large number of people, is needed to develop and implement the CRC.	Because the CRC is based upon meeting employer-identified skills needs, and is simple in its design and dissemination, it does not require a huge bureaucracy to be developed and implemented. However, it does require widespread support from business and industry, as well as state policymakers. Establishing a state CRC Taskforce allows business and industry to be "connected" with policymakers. The taskforce needs to consist of quality members, not quantity of members.
WorkKeys assessments are too expensive; obtainment of the individual CRC will cost too much.	The total cost of the three WorkKeys assessments recommended to assess core employability skills is approximately $15. Additional costs may be added to the $15 to cover associated scoring and "overhead" costs, i.e. printing and data entry, of the CRC. Therefore, the minimum estimated cost associated with the obtainment of each CRC is $45.